**Problem-Based Learning**

**Parkdale CI**

**1. Getting the Job**

a) When a school is described in a posting, in this case Parkdale CI, the first thing I would do is check relevant websites. Since Parkdale is in the Toronto District School Board, I would check their website first, as I would gain a brief summary of the statistics about the school and often there is a link to the website created by the school itself. From these sites, I would gain the names of the principal and vice-principals which I could contact if I needed more information regarding the school philosophy, although in this case, the Parkdale website is very thorough in listing everything from extra-curricular activities to examination policies.

**3. Homework**

i) Homework can be beneficial to the students of this school, since they are high school students. Paul Cappon, president of the Canadian Council on Learning in Ottawa, stated in an interview with the Globe and Mail that there is “evidence for the value of homework is for the later years." In fact, the Canadian Council on Learning has found that a number of studies on the effectiveness of homework suggest that homework has positive effects on grades, test scores and attitudes toward formal learning.

However the homework should fall under one of four categories: completion, practice, preparation or extension. The key thing is for the teachers to clearly articulate the purpose and expected outcome of the homework for the students, and that this homework is more geared towards reinforcement of lessons already taught. Coordination among the staff with respect to a homework policy is also vital, so as to not overburden students with work for them to do at home.

ii) My own policies for homework will be guided by my expectations of the students’ learning, the capabilities of my students for completing the assigned tasks and the school’s own homework policies. Generally, I believe that any homework should fall into one of four categories: completion, practice, preparation or extension.

Completion refers to any work assigned during the school day not completed in class; however, if there are a few students who continuously have completion homework, I would look at my own practices and try differentiate my teaching practices further, and document if there are any specifics that they have consistent difficulties with, in case these are students which have not yet been identified and given an IEP.

Practice refers to any work that reinforces skills and concepts taught in class. It is important, however, that students to already be able to independently perform the skills required, otherwise there is a high potential for the students to get frustrated trying to complete the work at home, and the homework will not be accomplishing the goal of reinforcement. Also, this may add to household stress due to homework, especially if the parents are not familiar with the area of study, or are lacking in language skills or education to assist the student (2007 Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning).

Preparation refers to any work that prepares students for upcoming work and classes. This type of homework would apply, for example, to any pre-lab work so that the student may start immediately on the next day, with at least some knowledge of protocols and safety requirements. In order to reinforce preparatory homework, I would not allow the student to begin a lab unless they have shown evidence of having completed the pre-lab requirements to my satisfaction. In terms of my own planning as a teacher, I would make sure that even if the student needed to take a little time at the beginning of class in order to prepare, they would not have an undue time penalty for completion of the lab.

Extension refers to any work that explores and refines learning in new contexts or integrates and expands on classroom. Homework that would fall under this category would be larger projects, such as the Reproduction Storybook, or the Molar Cookie. This type of homework would be given a larger block of time for completion, so that families can best support homework completion by balancing the time required to complete homework with extracurricular activities scheduled outside of the school day and homework from other classes which need to be completed daily. This type of homework will not require a student to learn curriculum content independently but instead deepen understanding and relate learning to the real world.

Parkdale CI has a clear document with respect to the homework policy (<http://schools.tdsb.on.ca/parkdale/homework.html>) , which is in agreement with both the TDSB and Ministry of Education policies, and also correlates very well with my own policies, and I would implement the school’s policies within my own classroom by posting that homework to AW within my class site, consisting of references to assigned work in the text and uploaded copies of documents handed out in class as well as uploading copies of all assignments, projects, culminating activities etc to AW.

iv) Grades for homework would very much depend on the type of homework assigned. Practice homework would be given a small check, because the goal of that form of homework is to reinforce skills which require repetition. These would not enter into the percentage grade for the course, but would contribute to the learning skills section of the report card. If a student occasionally does not complete this type of homework, I would not necessarily have any concerns, especially if they consistently demonstrate that they are mastering the skills and concepts. If the student often does not complete the practice homework, I will speak to the student in order to discern the reasons and whether they need more scaffolded help or remediation so that I can provide it or find another member of the staff who can, and I will contact the parents. Consistent failure to complete practice homework will be reflected in their learning skills section.

Completion homework would fall under the category of formative assessments, and as such provide vital information towards the ongoing learning of the students. As with practice homework, I would be willing to overlook occasional lapses by students, provided they demonstrate that they are understanding and mastering the lessons, however the student will be reminded that these assignments are being marked, and as such it is in their best interest to complete the work. If a student often fails to complete this type of homework, I would try to ascertain the issue, for example: Is the student getting distracted in class and therefore taking too much work from the class for homework? Are they having trouble with the content? Do they have any special needs which have not been assessed as yet? If there is no underlying cause, then if speaking with the student does not result in improvement, the parents will be informed and, in consultation with other staff and administration, different ways that the student can be assisted in succeeding will be discussed and implemented.

Preparation itself would not be marked, but may be required before the student can complete as assignment or a lab which would be marked. For example, there may be preparatory homework which would involve pre-lab questions regarding how the apparatus for a titration lab would be set up, what their design of the lab protocol for a Blast Off! Lab is, or what the student needs to keep in mind as safety issues when working with methane gas.

Extension homework will often fall under the inquiry or making connections categories of the curriculum, and as such will play an important role in the final mark of the student. However, extension homework may not be assigned as often as the other types, and will be given longer blocks of time for completion so that there will be opportunity both for the student to seek extra help, and for myself as the teacher to check in on the progress of the student. For example, the Molar Cookie assignment is given out. Before the final due date, there would be a check-in date for when students would show evidence that they have worked on Part A, and another where they need to show me one calculation for Part B so that I know that they understand how to convert from moles to cups. Progress charts will be created for larger projects so that the students and I can keep track of their progress. Refusal to complete the work will result in phone calls to parents, and discussions with administration and guidance, and will be reflected in the final mark.